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Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA IMMEDIATE
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E. O. 11652: ADS, DECLAS 12-31-73
TAGS: ETRN, PAN, CO
SUBJECT: CONSTRUCTION OF THIRD SEGMENT OF DARIEN GAP
HIGHWAY IN PANAMA

LIMA FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY KUBISCH

SUMMARY:

INTER- AGENCY COMMITTEE ON DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY HAS MADE
DECISION TEMPORARILY POSTPONE CONSTRUCTION ON CANGLON- YAPE
SECTION OF DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY. DECISION BASED PRIMARILY
ON DETERMINATION THAT CONSTRUCTION WILL PRESENT UNACCEPT-
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ABLE RISK OF SPREAD OF FMD TO PANAMA AND CENTRAL AMERICA AND POSES A REAL THREAT TO OUR LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY. THIS DETERMINATION BASED ON FACT THAT NO AGREEMENT YET REACHED WITH GOC AND THAT IN ITS ABSENCE, FMD CONTROL PROGRAM IN PANAMA, IN BEST AVAILABLE TECHNICAL JUDGMENT, COULD NOT BE STRENGTHENED IN TIME TO ENSURE AGAINST THE INCREASED FMD THREAT CREATED BY THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES RELATED TO HIGH-WAY CONSTRUCTION SO NEAR COLOMBIAN BORDER. BASED ON REVIEW, WE ARE ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT INCREASED FMD DANGER RESULTING FROM CONSTRUCTION SECOND SECTION IN PANAMA AND BELIEVE GOP SHOULD TAKE IMMEDIATE STEPS TO STRENGTHEN ITS FMD PROGRAM TO MEET THIS DANGER. USG IS PREPARED TO FINANCIALLY ASSIST GOP WITH THIS. EMBASSY REQUESTED INFORM GOP URGENTLY REASONS FOR U. S. DECISION AND TO ASCERTAIN GOP REACTION AND ITS WILLINGNESS PROCEED WITH AUGMENTED FMD PROGRAM. END SUMMARY.

1. AFTER CAREFUL REVIEW OF ALL IMPORTANT FACTORS, THE INTER- AGENCY COMMITTEE ON THE DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY HAS DECIDED TO TEMPORARILY POSTPONE U. S. AUTHORIZATION TO BEGIN THE BIDDING PROCESS FOR THE 42 KM CANGLON- YAPE SEGMENT IN PANAMA.

2. OVERRIDING FACTOR IN DECISION WAS THREAT OF FMD SPREAD. STATE, USDA AND DOT AGREE THAT CONSTRUCTION OF CANGLON-YAPE SEGMENT WOULD INCREASE THE DANGER OF AFTOSA SPREADING TO PANAMA AND NORTHWARD FROM PANAMA SUFFICIENTLY TO WARRANT A DELAY IN ADVERTISING THIS SECTION FOR BID UNTIL WE ARE ASSURED THAT ADEQUATE FMD MEASURES IN COLOMBIA HAVE BEEN AGREED UPON AND INITIATED. THIS DECISION PRIMARILY BASED ON OUR CONCERN THAT CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES IN THIS SECTION WOULD LEAD TO AN OVERALL INCREASE IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE YAVIZA- EL REAL AREA, AND THIS WOULD INCREASE THE FLOW OF COLOMBIANS CROSSING INTO PANAMA IN SEARCH OF WORK, MANY OF WHOM WOULD CARRY THEIR FOOD SUPPLIES FOR THE TRIP WITH THEM FROM COLOMBIA. WE WOULD EXPECT THAT THE CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES WOULD ALSO INCREASE THE SPEED AND AVAILABILITY OF WATER AND PERHAPS AIR TRANSPORTATION FROM YAVIZA/ EL REAL NORTHWARD CREATING A THREAT THAT COLOMBIANS CARRYING INFECTED ANIMAL PRODUCTS COULD MOVE RAPIDLY INTO PANAMA OR FURTHER NORTHWARD.
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SECONDLY, SINCE THE " LINK" SECTION OF THE HIGHWAY FROM BAYANO TO CANAZAS WILL NOT BEGIN CONSTRUCTION UNTIL LATE 1974 AT THE EARLIEST, THE AREAS OF PANAMA OPENED UP BY THE SECOND AND THIRD HIGHWAY SECTIONS WILL ACTUALLY BE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO COLOMBIAN SETTLERS THAN TO PANAMANIANS. YAVIZA/ EL REAL ARE ONLY 35 MILES FROM THE COLOMBIAN BORDER, BUT ARE ABOUT 80 MILES FROM WHERE THE DARIEN HIGHWAY

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REACHES THE BAYANO RIVER, THE CLOSEST LAND ACCESS FROM THE PANAMA SIDE.

3. EFFECT OF DECISION ON STATUS OF USG- GOP RELATIONS GIVEN GREAT IMPORTANCE AND CONSIDERED CAREFULLY. WE AGREE THAT GOP HAS MADE EXTENSIVE EFFORTS, BOTH FISCALLY AND ADMINISTRATIVELY, TO GEAR UP FOR PROGRAM CONSTRUCTION ESPECIALLY WHEN U. S. DESIRED SPEED- UP. GOP EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF FMD CONTROL HAVE BEEN GENERALLY ADEQUATE. CONSIDERATION ALSO GIVEN TO FACT THAT CONSTRUCTION WILL CONTINUE ON TWO PROJECTS IN 1973-74 AND SURVEYING WIOL TAKE PLACE ON FOURTH PROJECT; THEREFORE, CURRENTLY CONTRACTED ACTIVITY WILL CONTINUE. WE ALSO CONSIDERED POTENTIAL THREAT TO PANAMA' S CATTLE INDUSTRY AND MEAT EXPORTS AND OUR POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO TO FIGHT SPREAD OF FMD. THERE IS GENERAL AGREE-

MENT HERE THAT DECISION WILL INVOLVE SOME POLITICAL COSTS BUT THAT THEY MUST REGRETTABLY BE INCURRED.

4. SECONDARY FACTOR IN EQUATION, BUT STILL OF SOME IMPORTANCE, IS IMPACT ON FMD NEGOTIATIONS WITH GOC. DECISION TO POSTPONE SHOULD PROVIDE VISIBLE EVIDENCE TO GOC OF OUR APPREHENSION ABOUT DISEASE AND FACILITATE REACHING EFFECTIVE AGREEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION.

5. WITH REGARD TO FMD PROGRAM IN PANAMA, WE NOW BELIEVE THAT STRENGTHENING SHOULD OCCUR IN ANY EVENT, SINCE EVEN THE SECOND HIGHWAY SECTION (CANAZAS TO CANGLON) CONTRIBUTES TO FMD DANGER. WE RECOGNIZE THAT GOP IS DOING THE BEST POSSIBLE JOB OF IMPLEMENTING FMD AND BORDER CONTROLS AND THAT IT IS WILLING TO IMPROVE ITS PROGRAM WITH U. S. ASSISTANCE. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT IN THIS PRIMITIVE AREA IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOP AUTHORITIES TO
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EFFECTIVELY STEM A FLOW OF COLOMBIANS ATTRACTED BY THE HIGHWAY. AS REPORTED IN BOGOTA' S 4358, WITHIN THE PAST NINE MONTHS COLOMBIANS HAVE SETTLED ALONG THE HIGHWAY ROUTE IN COLOMBIA UP TO A FEW MILES OF BORDER, APPARENTLY USING SURVEYORS' MARKINGS AS GUIDES. NEEDS IN PANAMA INCLUDE MORE INSPECTORS AND INSPECTION FACILITIES, REFURBISHING OR REPLACEMENT OF VEHICLES, MORE REGULARIZED FUNDING, REGULAR SUPPLY OF MEAT FROM PANAMA TO CATTLE- FREE ZONES, ETC. WHILE BULK OF USG FUNDS WILL BE REQUIRED FOR PROPOSED AFTOSA CONTROL PROGRAM IN COLOMBIA, USG WILLING PROVIDE SOME FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM 10 MILLION DOLLAR FUND MENTIONED IN NSC MEMO DATED APRIL 26, 1973.

6. WE ARE NOT NOW IN POSITION TO DETERMINE LENGTH OF

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POSTPONEMENT, GIVEN UNCERTAINTY OVER AGREEMENT WITH GOC. SHOULD AGREEMENT BE REACHED WITH GOC IN JULY OR AUGUST AND SUFFICIENT IMPLEMENTATION BE INITIATED PROMPTLY, WE INTEND REVIEW DECISION ON CONGLON- YAPE SECTION. IF REVIEW WERE FAVORABLE, THIS WOULD STILL ALLOW TIME TO COMPLETE BIDDING PROCESS AND BEGIN CONSTRUCTION DURING 73-74 DRY SEASON- FUNDING WOULD BE AVAILABLE. AGREEMENT ON STRENGTHENED PANAMA PROGRAM WOULD BE IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THIS REVIEW. IF NO AGREEMENT REACHED IN JULY OR AUGUST WITH GOC, POSTPONEMENT WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO EXTEND INTO CY 1974 BUT WOULD NOT EFFECT BAYANO- CANAZAS SEGMENT OR PROJECT 2.

7. ACTION: DRAWING UPON FOREGOING, EMBASSY SHOULD CONVEY TO GOP U. S. DECISION TO POSTPONE TEMPORARILY CONSTRUCTION OF CONGLON- YAPE SECTION OF DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY. IN ITS DEMARCHE EMBASSY SHOULD EMPHASIZE TEMPORARY NATURE THIS POSTPONEMENT AND NOTE THAT OTHER WORK ALREADY UNDER

CONTRACT WILL CONTINUE. FURTHER, WHILE EXPRESSING OUR APPRECIATION FOR PANAMA' S EFFORTS TO AVOID SPREAD OF AFTOSA, EMBASSY SHOULD STRESS THAT U. S. DECISION BASED PRIMARILY ON OUR CONCERN OVER PREVENTING SPREAD TO PANAMA AND NORTHWARD OF THIS DISEASE AND ON OUR COMMITMENT TO CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO. EMBASSY SHOULD ALSO INITIATE PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS WITH GOP ON REQUIREMENTS FOR STRENGTHENED PROGRAM ON BASIS PARA 5 ABOVE. WE REALIZE
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NO FIRM PANAMANIAN COMMITMENT IS POSSIBLE IMMEDIATELY ON STRENGTHENED PROGRAM BUT ANY PRELIMINARY REACTION WILL BE HELPFUL.

8. DEPARTMENT WILL APPRECIATE LEARNING BY COB TUESDAY, JUNE 26, GOP GENERAL REACTION AS WELL AS ITS WILLINGNESS AND CAPABILITY TO STRENGTHEN FMD PROGRAM. RUSH

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